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ABSTRACT

Intended for parents of learning disabled children, the booklet provides suggestions for recognizing symptoms of a learning disability, child management, and activities to stimulate learning. Also included is information on hyperactivity, ways to work with the teacher and principal, and books or pamphlets about learning disabilities. (DB)

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PARENT HANDBOOK

For Parents of Children
Who Learn in Different Ways

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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CONTENTS

How Can You Recognize a Learning Disabled Child? 1

Is Your Child Hyperactive? 3

How Can You Help at Home? 3

How Should You Handle Your Child? 5

What Don't You Do? 6

What Help Can You Get from the Teacher or Principal? 7

Activities
- What Things Can You Do with Small Ones? 9
- What Things Can You Do with Older Ones? 10

What Can You Read? 10

HOW CAN YOU RECOGNIZE A LEARNING DISABLED CHILD?

The key word in the following remarks concerning learning disabilities is "may." Some of the following statements may apply to your child, some may not. If many of the following descriptions seem to fit your child, he (or she) may have a learning disability (or be going to have one). If you suspect trouble, get some special testing; your child can be taught in unusual ways so that he WILL learn.

1. A smart child may be unable to pick up the sounds and rhythms of language. His hearing is OK (you've checked that); he just doesn't seem to translate what he hears into meaning very well. He says "huh" a lot.

2. At school he may have a short attention span, because he doesn't understand all that is being said to him.

3. He may not be able to remember written letters, words, directions, or numbers. His vision is OK (you've checked that), but he doesn't retain what he sees on the page.

4. He may not be able to handle spoken or written commands that have too many parts to them. Example: "Go into your room; put away your clothes; then wash up. I want you to set the table for dinner." You've asked your child to do four separate things IN ORDER! He can't do it, gets confused and forgets. Then maybe you get mad, which adds to his troubles.

5. He may not be able to watch a demonstration and listen to what is being said at the same time. He often has trouble putting whole sentences together; he gropes for the right word a lot. He may be unable to repeat nursery rhymes or words to a simple song.

6. He may be slower doing his assignments (often not finishing them) because it takes him longer to "get it together" in his head.

7. He may be clumsy—tripping, spilling things, running into things. He may have many accidents and break things. He may have trouble skipping, running, throwing or kicking a ball. He may find it

extremely difficult to follow a line drawn with chalk on the sidewalk. He may have difficulty tying his shoes or holding a crayon, long after others his age are doing it.

8. He may have trouble telling the time of day, when something happened, or parts of a story or incident in the order they happened.

9. He may have trouble remembering the days of the week, months of the year, or his birthday, long after other children know these things.

10. He may not be able to judge how high or low things are. He may have trouble judging how far he is from other children or things. Sometimes this causes him trouble in sports.

11. He may be ***very*** easily frustrated when he has trouble doing things. He may just quit and not want to try again.

Note: In many cases the learning disabled child ***may*** just be developing more slowly than his classmates, but this is all the more reason for giving him all the added teaching, support, understanding and extra good times that you can.

12. He may not understand ***position*** words such as "under," "over," "around," "above," etc. He may not be able to understand ***time*** words such as "after," "before," "following," "next," etc.

IS YOUR CHILD HYPERACTIVE?

Not all learning disabled children are overactive, but some are. As toddlers these children were always on the move, hard to hold and cuddle, late to sleep at night and often fussy. They are always bruised from many falls and bumps. (Every child does some of this, they do more.)

They may often seem fearless, never considering the consequences of their actions. They may also be awkward and poorly coordinated, but it's hard to tell because they are always on the move, and they go fast. They have no patience with things or others (including themselves). They don't like less active play.

The hyperactive child is distracted from his work or play by the slightest change around him—a car going by outside, someone going by his desk. He reacts to EVERYTHING! Therefore it is extremely hard for him to concentrate. He may break things because he reacts immediately without thinking of the consequences. He may yell out answers to the teacher's questions without waiting to be called on, and in too loud a voice.

A few learning disabled children are the opposite. They are "underactive." They were unusually "good" babies. Now they take little interest in things, do poorly in school, don't make friends. They seem to lack normal curiosity and may be sluggish or slow in class. Teachers and classmates may consider them immature, even mentally retarded. But they are not mentally retarded. Sometimes these children are the last to be helped, because they make so little trouble.

HOW CAN YOU HELP AT HOME?

Remember. It's hard to be the parent of a child with a learning problem. You have to be a superparent!

1. He needs to play. If he's had a lot of failure and frustration at school, he may come home out of sorts. It helps him to do something active. Make sure he has time to play. Don't overschedule him into lessons and activities.

2. Help develop his play skills. Throw a ball with him. Kickball is good. If he writes with his right hand, try to get him to kick with his right foot. Don't stress this, however, if he resists. The main idea is for him to have fun.

3. Use old lumber scraps and large-headed nails that can be easily driven, and let him build things. Material scraps and iron-on seam tape can

make patchwork fun. Let him make forts out of blankets and chairs. Remember, it's easier to pick up a few messes at the end of the day than to try to put together a broken child.

4. Talk to him, sympathize with him when things are tough, but don't make a big deal of his troubles.

5. Find out what he really likes to do--something that isn't frustrating for him. Then, if possible, do it with him. If not, find someone who can.

6. Try to recall what happened just before he "blew up." What might you have done to ease the pressure (maybe nothing, but check anyhow)?

7. List the things he does at home that are most irritating. A change in home routine may help. If he fights with brothers and sisters, try to determine the root of the problem, and talk it out with the children.

8. Use a system of rewards. Try to remember to tell him when he does something right (he knows when he does things wrong). Smile when appropriate, tousle his hair, use praise and a hug as much as possible without being "too sweet." These children endure so much more criticism, impatience, frustration and shame than other youngsters.

9. If you use a system of rewards, do so immediately after he has earned the reward.

10. ESTABLISH A ROUTINE AT YOUR HOUSE. It may be hard on you and the rest of the family, but it will help your learning disabled child. Decide what the schedule around the house will be each school day, then do it the same way EVERY DAY. This is especially helpful for the child who doesn't remember things or has a hard time organizing.

11. Don't make a lot of rules for the child. But be sure he follows consistently those you do make. Be sure your husband/wife agrees to the rules.

12. Speak more slowly to this child; remember not to ask him to do too much at once. Be sure he understands directions--have him repeat them to you, but don't show impatience when you ask him. Tell him it's a good memory trick.

13. Teach him the rules of games so he'll feel like playing with other children. They may not be as patient with him as you are.

14. Quietly, but firmly, demand that your other children be patient with your learning disabled child. (If he were physically handicapped, would you tolerate their teasing him?)

15. Tell your child he has a learning problem. Pick a good time, after a good experience. Level with him. Tell him you'll help whenever you can, but basically he'll have to work harder than many other children. Tell him that spelling may never come easy for him, but many famous people had the same problem—like Einstein!

16. Buy two things for your learning disabled child: 1) ***a small free-standing chalkboard***. Let him trace letters and words in the kitchen while you're fixing dinner. 2) ***a medium-sized bulletin board***. Write notes (printing clearly) to remind your child of things. Let him pin up his own written reminders (school notices, movies on Saturday, etc.).

HOW SHOULD YOU HANDLE YOUR CHILD?

1. When giving directions, get his attention first. Then make sure he understands what you mean. Finally, give him one direction at a time. If you can, show him as well as tell him.

2. Be calm but firm when telling him to do something. Act as if you fully expect to be obeyed. If he says "no," wait a minute (don't start arguing), then firmly restate the directions. It may help to act as if you are already doing something else. Stay around to see that he does follow your order, but don't appear to notice him too much while he is making up his mind to obey you.

3. Don't give him numerous directions all the time, or he'll "turn you off." If you can, give him a choice about doing something.

4. When he's slow to finish things, ask him questions about the activity. This gets his mind back on what he's supposed to be doing. It's better than lecturing him.

5. Give a child a choice only when you ***really*** mean that he can do it

either way. When you really want him to obey, state your direction firmly—don't ask him if he would like to do it!

6. MAKE HIM INDEPENDENT! Only give him help when he needs it. Let him figure out how things work (if it's not dangerous).

7. Every time you can, give your child praise. When he's excited about something, you should take time to be excited, too. TALK TO YOUR CHILD. ASK HIM QUESTIONS. Questions which must be answered with more than a "yes" or a "no" are most helpful.

WHAT DON'T YOU DO?

1. Don't give long lectures to a small child. He will only become bored.

2. Don't make lots of rules. Make a few important ones and stick to them (sometimes on special occasions, relax the rules to show him you're human).

3. Don't talk about your child in front of him. Remember, he has feelings, too.

4. Don't tease, and don't be sarcastic with your child. Don't laugh at him—laugh with him.

5. Don't break promises to him. If you say you're going to do something, do it!

WHAT HELP CAN YOU GET FROM THE TEACHER OR PRINCIPAL?

The Teacher May Tell You:

He doesn't concentrate, he's always out of his seat, he disturbs others, he doesn't finish anything, he's easily frustrated, disorganized or lazy. He daydreams, doesn't follow directions. His writing and spelling are bad. He works slowly. He isn't learning, but he'll probably grow out of it.

You Should Say To the Teacher:

1. I'm not willing to wait until he "grows out of it." He can be damaged too badly by that time.

2. I, too, have noticed that something is wrong (this helps the teacher, she sees that you recognize problems).

3. Tell her the kinds of home problems you have with your child.

4. Ask the teacher what kinds of things frustrate your child; what happens just before he "blows."

5. Ask her (him) what subjects your child does like; ask if your child could do more of those subjects at home with parents' help.

6. Say to the teacher, "What positive non-punishing ways could WE use to control the 'bad' behavior?" Let her know that you are going to try to help her.

7. If school work rather than bad behavior is a problem, help your child at home (if you can without getting upset). If you DO get upset, get someone else to do it. Pay him or her if you need to.

8. Suggest (for first through fourth graders) a TWO WAY NOTE SYSTEM. Tell her, "I'll send a note to school telling you what we're doing at home and how it's working out, if you'll send me a note once a week telling me what you're trying at school and how I can help."

9. Important! Remember to let the teacher know that you know there are alternative small-group reading/math programs for the child who is having trouble learning from the traditional teaching methods. These small group programs often make use of the child's sense of hearing or touch, as well as his sense of sight.

10. If possible, find a sitter or good day care for your other children and

offer to come to school as a mother volunteer a few hours a week. You can correct workbooks or read a story to one group while the teacher works with the others. If your child's teacher doesn't want you in her room, for whatever reason, offer to help out somewhere else in the school. This helps when it comes time to see the principal!

You and Your Principal:

Your principal may not know much about learning disabilities, but he knows about many other things—like how to run a school! So forgive him if he's not an expert in everything. But DO make an appointment to see him AFTER you have seen the teacher. Tell her you are going to do this so she won't think you are going behind her back. Tell her you want to ask the principal about special materials, special testing, and specialist help.

Always try to let the teacher know you want to work with her. But also let both the teacher and the principal know if your child is having problems learning, some changes must be made in his school program. Then commit yourself to making some changes at home!

ACTIVITIES

Remember: Start activities by laying out the materials. Often his just seeing the material gets him interested. Demonstrate simple things with the material that he could do. Don't be so much better doing something

yourself that your child doesn't even want to try. Don't tell him what's wrong with his picture (or painting, or clay molding). Say, "Gee, you're sure learning to do that well!" Always put his work on display. GIVE HIM A HUG, OR SMILE OR WINK while he's working.

What Things Can You Do with Small Ones?

1. Make up listening games. Have him listen for the dryer to go off; set the timer on the stove, then have him do some small task before it goes off. Make up a code with taps on the table; play this when traveling, or when you must wait. Have him close his eyes when you are housecleaning, and as you work make noises with different objects from different parts of the room.

2. Make up games to help him notice things more. Let him put wax on the kitchen floor to "see" the difference. Let him organize the pots, silverware, etc. in the cupboard. Get pretty rocks and put them in a small basket; let him notice the differences in color and texture. Give him labels from vegetable cans as you empty them—at the store he can match the labels to cans on the shelves, if you locate the proper aisle for him. Then let him put the cans in the cupboard at home.

3. Let him fold, stir, pour, measure things. Have him catch things that won't break (rolled socks, etc.), and put them in a "special" drawer. Have him do exercises with you—it will be good for both of you!

4. Make circles, squares and triangles out of clay rolled into long strips. Let him close his eyes and tell you what they are. This works with troublesome words, too.

5. Ask your child to tell you one thing he "heard" that day. Get him a calendar (his own) and mark his birthday, your birthday, etc. Have him check the calendar when a "big day" is approaching. When you're traveling, point out street signs, house numbers, etc.

6. If your child is just beginning to read—first or second grade—cut out letters of sandpaper and let him put together *simple* words from the letters. Then have him close his eyes, trace with his fingers, and then tell you the word. Remember, use easy words—this should be fun for him.

7. Go to the library, the bookstore, or the magazine section of the supermarket and find simple riddle books to read with your child. When you first start reading, let him read the last word of every line in a rhyme. (If he doesn't want to at first, don't force him.)

8. When books that he wants to buy or check out from the library are too difficult, bring home just one difficult book and read it to him. If possible, also bring home an easier one that he can read.

9. Get story records and then let your child retell the story to you.

What Things Can You Do with Older Ones?

1. Let the child help around the house—not just taking out the garbage, but creative things like making the coffee every morning. Let him whip cream, put the roast in the oven, fold clothes, and reach things with a short ladder. Let him organize closets with towels or linens.

2. Play guessing games at home or in the car. "How many things do you see that start with the 't' sound?" Have him read large-print signs or billboards, but be sure he has adequate time to "study" the words before he has to read them (the faster the speed of the car, the harder the task).

3. Learning words through tracing. Write the word about two inches high on thin paper with a felt pen. Place another thin paper over it. Let the child trace the letters of a small word five to eight times with his index finger, saying the letter sound as he traces them. When he finishes the word, he should say it. Now let him trace with the felt pen, moving the paper each time until he has traced the word eight or ten times. Next, remove the tracing work and let him copy the word on the first sheet. Finally, have him write the word from memory on a clean sheet of paper or on a small chalk board.

4. Leave notes for your learning disabled child (simple short ones) telling where you are. Then ask him to write notes to you letting you know where he is and any other information you might need. This activity helps him to organize himself better and it also provides writing practice.

WHAT CAN YOU READ?

In order to help your child, you may have to do some reading, to understand his problem. This handbook gives you only a few important facts about learning disabilities, and a few brief suggestions of things to do with your child. Here are some books and pamphlets which will provide valuable background information on why your child acts as he does and how you can help him.

Brutten, Milton. ***Something's Wrong with My Child***. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. Excellent handbook for parents, $7.50.

Crosby, R.M.N., M.D. ***The Waysiders***. New York: Delacorte Press, 1968. Available through state library.

Edgington, R. ***Helping Children with Reading Difficulty***. Chicago: Developmental Learning Materials. Good materials, $1.00.

Ellingson, Careth. ***The Shadow Children***. Chicago: Topaz Books, 1966. Good starting point, $6.50.

Golick, Margaret, ***She Thought I Was Dumb, But I Told Her I Had a Learning Disability***. Toronto, Canada: The Bryant Press Limited for CBC Publications, Box 500, Station A, 1971. Quick reading—good information, $1.00 paperback.

Miller, Julano. ***Helping Your LD Child at Home***. San Rafael, CA: Academic Therapy Publications, 1973. Good practical things to do, $2.00 paperback.

Stewart, Mark A., M.D. ***Raising a Hyperactive Child***. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers. Two hundred and eighty-five pages of good material, $8.95.

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